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Communications
National Conference of Catholic Bishops / United States Catholic Conference

Press For Human Rights Progress in East Timor, Archbishop Urges

WASHINGTON (June 5, 1998) -- With the recent changes in the government of Indonesia, the time is ripe for the U.S. government to press for progress on human rights issues in East Timor, according to Archbishop Theodore E. McCarrick of Newark (NJ).

In a letter today to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the Chairman of the U.S. Catholic Conference International Policy Committee said "this would seem an appropriate moment for the United States to press anew for a speedy resolution of the East Timor status question."

The Indonesian military invaded the Portuguese half of the island of Timor in 1975 and annexed it 1976. It has been estimated that as much as one-sixth of the population has since died of starvation, disease and fighting. In addition to the much resented military presence, the Indonesian government has severely curtailed freedom of the press, speech, and assembly.

Archbishop McCarrick reminded Secretary Albright that the people of East Timor must decide their own fate, and urged the United States in the meantime to "advocate and immediate and genuine reduction of the Indonesian military presence in East Timor, the release of prisoners incarcerated for purely political reasons, the guarantee of freedom of speech and assembly, and an end to the abuses of peoples' human rights."

Simultaneously, Archbishop McCarrick sent a letter to 1996 Nobel Peace Prize co-laureate, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo of Dili in East Timor, assuring him of the "continued solidarity" of the U.S. Bishops.

Text of Archbishop McCarrick's letter to Secretary Albright.
Text of Archbishop McCarrick's letter to Bishop Belo.

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